

Chairman Warrey and Members of the Committee,

I want to ask for particular attention to my testimony from member Representative Koppelman, as you represent my district and I am your constituent. I am writing testimony in favor of HB 1495 to support requiring businesses to hold jobs for employees who run for office and win their elections and not discriminate against potential employees who are running for office. This is a necessary and important update to our century code for a few reasons. First, with upcoming term limits and the turnover of many legislators' seats, the state will be looking for many candidates to fill these vacant seats. In rural areas, many incumbent legislators have run unopposed for years because of a lack of candidates who are willing to or are able to step up and run for office. This problem will become glaringly obvious when rural legislators hit their term limits and the districts struggle to come up with candidates. Rural areas come with limited job opportunities and if someone is going to lose perhaps their only job option in their town or county, they will not be likely to run for office because they would lose their means to support themselves. This could cause huge issues for our state if we are unable to fill vacant seats due to a lack of candidates.

The second reason is that there are many professionals either just starting their careers or long into them who cannot afford to lose their job, but want to engage with the civic process of the state. If they already have a start on their career, why should they be forced to abandon it just to serve their fellow citizens? Because this law does not already exist, there are many working people who currently cannot run for office because they are unable to lose their position and the work they have put into their career. They should not be forced to wait until retirement, if they are fortunate enough to live that long, to run for office. We need more young professionals in our legislature to bring their experiences and

perspectives to the state. If we want to continue building our workforce, we need people who are boots on the ground in it to help inform the policies we implement and they need to come from a variety of industries for a fuller perspective. And if we want our high school and college graduates to stay in the state, having young professionals in the legislature will help us to meet the needs of the younger populations. It is only right that we create opportunities for anyone to access running for office if they so choose, not just those who are self employed, farmers, realtors, or retirees, as much of the current legislature is. While these are not bad things to be or bad perspectives to be had, they should not be the only ones even possible.

Third, the disallowing of discriminating against someone in a hiring process if they disclose or the hiring manager is aware of their candidacy for state office is important to allow people to find jobs they are qualified for and would enjoy or take pride in, but lose out on because they are also pursuing a passion to serve their state. I experienced this last summer after graduating with my master's degree from NDSU. I was on the ballot while interviewing with multiple places and I chose to voluntarily disclose during my interviews that I was seeking public office. I wanted to be up front and honest so they could see I was someone with integrity. All of these jobs ended up choosing someone else for the role. While I can't be certain that it was the disclosure, nor would I be so bold as to assume I was the best candidate every time, it did feel like disclosing was not working in my favor. In the job that did hire me in late June, I opted not to disclose during my interview that I was on the ballot. This was after the primary election, and I had an online presence so I decided I would be honest if asked about it. It never came up, and it wasn't until a week into the job that I told anyone I was seeking office. This was a surprise to everyone, and then conversations turned to what would happen if I won the seat and would I be allowed to remain on staff. I lost my

election so nothing came of it, but it was interesting to see that the one time I decided not to mention it, I was finally hired. This should not have been my reality, nor should it be the reality of anyone else moving forward. Businesses may not want to deal with the what ifs of someone they are considering hiring winning elected office, but they should not be allowed to count that against anyone. If the person is the right candidate for the job, they should be hired, and their public service viewed as a good thing and not a hindrance. They should not have to decide between being honest about their candidacy or finding gainful employment in our state. It does not benefit the legislature, it does not benefit the citizens, and it does not benefit our workforce.

Public service isn't always convenient or easy, but we need fellow citizens to step up and do it anyway. We should enable them to have or find a job while running for office or serving in the legislature so they can enjoy employment in the majority of the time that they are not in session. People want to be able to pay their bills and have a place to live, but they may also want to pursue civic service out of a sense of duty to their country or a passion for serving others. The citizens of North Dakota should be able to do both. Please give a Do-Pass Recommendation on HB 1495, and work with your fellow House members to pass the bill so our legislature can continue to be full, have new ideas and perspectives, and serve our great state.

Thank you,

Heather Tyulyandin

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